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Dispatches from The Fringe - Farm is innovative theatre at its best

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Farm
WillFredd Theatre

Farm by WillFredd Theatre

Rating: ★★★★★

In many rural communities they're called Blow-In's. People from towns or cities usually, who relocate to rural villages. Whatever their reasons, they're always viewed as outsiders who never grew up with the land or its people. For outsiders who've ever wondered about the rural psyche, or insiders looking for theatre that reflects their lived experience, welcome to WillFredd's production of *Farm*, an innovative, theatrical journey through all things farming.

Proceedings begin with the audience being herded around a fence, beyond which, in a small office area, a series of land purchases are being discussed. Discussion degenerate into a childish game as cotton wool sheep are distributed on sheets of paper which represents the land being divided. Petty squabbles about who owns what magical horse ensue until a cry goes up, the tall shutters to the rear of the room are lifted and a real horse, pulling a flatbed cart, enters. The

audience, or cattle, are herded into another area where the next scene unfolds. This one about a Swiss Roll loving farmer sharing his wisdom on the cycles of the farming year, but not his Swiss Roll. Throughout, *Farm* tries to convey something of the ruthlessness and romanticism of the farming way of life. A way of life that may slowly be dying out.

Trusting the audience to fill in the imaginative blanks, director Sophie Motley takes her audience on an idiosyncratic tour of imaginative spaces, rural and theatrical, in this cleverly realised production that is funny and moving in equal measures. Motley's use of screens and projections for the hearing impaired was a wonderful addition, opening the theatrical experience to many who may not always have been able to access it. Featuring strong performances by a versatile and dedicated cast including Jack Cawley, Paul Curley, Ralph Kelly, Emma O'Kane, Shane O'Reilly and Marie Ruane, *Farm* danced, sang and signed its way through a series of shifting performance landscapes.

While always theatrically inventive, not all scenes worked as well with a few suffering from being a tad too long, particularly the fork balancing scene whose power began to dissipate the longer the scene went on. But some scenes were pitched perfectly, most notably when *Farm* drew to its conclusion and the audience were treated to some mead, Swiss Roll and a sing song just before closing time. Lights flickered, the last song sung and the cast, unfenced, headed off singing into the night, leaving behind a sense of triumph for this imaginative, innovative and immersive theatre experience.

Farm goes on tour nationwide between November 2012 and March 2013. Go to <http://www.willfredd.com/> for more information



Chris O'Rourke
Tulsa Theater Examiner

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